

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building

Other name/site number: Western Union Building

2. Location

100-114 East 7th Street

N/A not for publication

Kansas City

N/A vicinity

state Missouri code MO county Jackson code 095 zip code 64111

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

LaVerne Brondel
Signature of certifying official LaVerne Brondel/Deputy SHPO

12/27/12
Date

Missouri Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.
(See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

 entered in the National Register.

 See continuation sheet

 determined eligible for the National Register.

 See continuation sheet

 determined not eligible for the National Register. _____

 removed from the National Register. _____

 other, (explain:)

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

Property Name Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph BuildingCounty and State Jackson County, MissouriPage 2

5. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	No. of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	contributing	noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u> Total	

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple
property listing.)No. of contributing resources previously
listed in the National Register.

N/A

0

6. Functions or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)COMMERCE/TRADE: businessCOMMERCE/TRADE: business

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial StyleFoundation CONCRETEWalls BRICKRoof ASPHALTOther: STONE: Limestone

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Property Name Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph BuildingCounty and State Jackson County, MissouriPage 3**8. Statement of Significance**

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMUNICATIONS

Period of Significance

1920-1952

Significant Dates

19201944

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Smith, Charles A. architectVan Sant, J. R. Construction Company, contractor

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Property Name Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph BuildingCounty and State Jackson County, MissouriPage 4

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing
(36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings
Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering
Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☒ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Specify repository:

Landmarks Commission of Kansas City, Missouri

Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections

Western Historical Manuscript Collection, University of Missouri at Kansas City

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. <u>15</u> <u>36</u> <u>32</u> <u>60</u> <u>43</u> <u>29</u> <u>70</u> <u>00</u> | 3. <u>1</u> <u>1111</u> <u>11111</u> |
| Zone Easting Northing | Zone Easting Northing |
| 2. <u>1</u> <u>1111</u> <u>11111</u> | 4. <u>1</u> <u>1111</u> <u>11111</u> |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Cathy Ambler, Ph.D. and Sally F. Schwenkorganization Historic Preservation Services, LLC date August 24, 2002street & number 323 West 8th Street, Suite 112 telephone (816) 221-5133city or town Kansas City state Missouri zip code 64105

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black-and-white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Rick C. Watkinsstreet & number 7301 Mission Road, Suite 249 telephone 913-432-5555city or town Prairie Village state KS zip code 66208

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION STATEMENT

The Western Union Telegraph Building, located at 100 -114 E 7th Street, is a four-story commercial style building measuring approximately 100 feet by 120 feet. The 48,000 square foot building is on the northern edge of the Downtown commercial area. The primary façade faces onto 7th Street (south) and Walnut Street (west) (Photograph #1). A secondary elevation faces an alley and Grand Boulevard, approximately a half-block to the east (Photograph #2). The rear elevation faces a three-story commercial building to the north (Photograph #3). The building has a flat roof and a skewed rectangular plan. Brick veneer faces the reinforced concrete structure. Narrow, engaged, vertical brick piers define ten bays on the 7th Street (south) façade and six bays on the Walnut Street (west) façade. On the west and south elevations, storefront entrances and display windows fill the bays on the ground floor. Large, two- and three-part, aluminum-frame windows fill the original bays of the third and fourth stories. A shaped parapet rises above the roofline on the primary façades. The building retains integrity of location and setting, a high degree of its character-defining stylistic ornaments, and key exterior materials dating from the period of historic significance.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

7TH STREET AND WALNUT STREET FAÇADES

Engaged brick piers capped with geometrically shaped cut-stone emblems define the bays of the Walnut and 7th street façades (Photographs #1, #4, #5).¹ On these primary facades, storefront entrances and display windows fill the bays on the ground floor. A tripartite, wood-frame transom spans the width of each of the first-story bays of the primary façades, each of which contains storefront entrances with three- and four-part, wood-frame display windows. The transom space changes in height to accommodate the change in grade across the building lot. Rectangular, metal, replacement windows, arranged in pairs and bands of three, fill the original bays on the second story of each primary elevation. Cut-stone stringcourses and brown brick distinguish the two lower stories from the red brick of the upper stories. Large, two- and three-part, aluminum-frame windows fill the original bays of the third and fourth stories. All of the bays retain the original soldier brick lintels and limestone sills. The shaped parapet has cut-stone coping. Below the cornice is a central terra-cotta sign panel that reads "WESTERN UNION" (Photograph # 5).² A tapestry brick frieze, interspersed with contrasting square-cut limestone medallions, runs the length of the cornice within a corbel-course frame and forms the decorative base of the parapet (Photograph #6).

¹ Upon field inspection, all ornamentation, sills, and coping identified as cut stone on the original plans appear to be tooled limestone. Original floor plans and elevations included as figures on continuation page of this nomination.

² The original plans identify the sign panels as terra-cotta. Field inspection determined the sign area to be composed of six panels of either cast stone or unglazed terra-cotta.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 2

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

The 7th Street façade has ten bays. The west end bay of the first story of the 7th Street (south) façade contains a replacement storefront entrance that consists of a pair of aluminum-frame glass doors and a wood-frame side window to the east (Photograph # 9). Boarding material with a faux stucco veneer covers the original, central, single entrance. A louvered vent covers the transom area above the entrance. These are reversible additions. The east end bay of 7th Street façade retains the combined single and double-leaf entrances and the original wood-frame doors (Photograph #8). Each door contains a full-height central pane of glass. A wood panel covered in a stucco-like material covers a single door opening within this entrance bay.

The Walnut Street façade has six bays. The north end bay of the first story of the Walnut Street (west) façade retains the original recessed entrance flanked by storefront windows with transom space above (Photograph #7). The wood-frame entrance door contains a full-height central pane of glass and incorporates a narrow, operable transom window. Moving south across the façade, the next bay contains a single, fixed-sash, wood-frame window and an overhead metal door with transom space above. Above this bay, the original, steel fire escape stairs rise to the fourth floor. The next bay to the south contains the original three-door configuration consisting of paired doors leading to the main corridor and a third single door leading to an interior stairwell. Each of these wood-frame doors contains a full-height central pane of glass. The remaining three bays to the south contain wood-frame storefront windows.

SECONDARY ELEVATIONS

Both of the secondary (east and north) elevations are void of decorative detailing. The reinforced concrete structure is apparent on these elevations and terra-cotta coping tile caps the parapet. The east wall (Photograph #2) faces an alleyway and a surface parking lot, making it visible from Grand Boulevard. The irregular, asymmetrical fenestration of this façade is intact, with header brick windowsills, stretcher brick lintels, and 27 percent of the original three-over-three light and two-over-two light, double-hung, steel sash windows containing safety glass. Approximately half of the window openings in this façade are covered with plywood and/or plywood with stucco covering. New, wood-frame, fixed-sash windows and/or glass block replaces 25 percent of the original windows. The north end bay of this façade is only one-story high and forms a light well above a small service bay with an overhead metal door.

Portions of the north façade (Photograph #3) were once a party wall to a neighboring building and now face a narrow surface parking lot. The upper three stories of the east half of this façade are recessed one bay to form a light well. The original windows that pierced the recessed wall are covered with plywood/stucco.

INTERIOR

Open floor plates with exposed structural concrete columns distinguish the interior of the Western Union Building. Public spaces (Photographs #11, #14, #15) – including entrance corridors (Photograph #12), open lobby space, and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 3

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

stairwells and elevators – retain their historic configuration (Photographs #12, #13, #16, #17). The spatial arrangement of non-public work areas and upper-story spaces have been altered through the removal of original wall sections, as well as restroom and locker room fixtures. Most of these alterations occurred during a technological change to automated routing equipment beginning in 1944.³ These spaces continue to convey the character-defining open floor plates and exposed structural columns as they were originally configured. Many of the original doors, stairwells, and elevator cabs for public and employee use are intact. Carpeting covers the concrete floors in the public and office spaces, while the floors of the non-public work and processing areas and employee amenities spaces are either covered with synthetic tile or left exposed. Terrazzo flooring is intact in some bathroom spaces. The original plaster treatment covers the extant original walls and ceilings, which vary in height and average 13 feet. Suspended ceilings and partition walls, as well as furred-out walls and columns are easily reversible alterations found in approximately half of the interior spaces.

INTEGRITY

The building occupies its original location and the setting continues to reflect commercial usage. Topographical features that relate to the bluffs overlooking the Missouri River and the cut of Walnut and 7th streets into the bluff remain. Man-made features include the streetscape infrastructure, sidewalk, curbs, etc. A review of the historic maps indicates that the sidewalk width and distance from the street have not changed significantly. Through the years, a variety of buildings in adjoining areas have changed. The greatest change is to the north where construction of the 6th Street Trafficway (I-70) destroyed the link between the original Old Town and the later Downtown development. However, a historic building facing onto Walnut, located adjacent to the building on the north, remains and acts as a buffer from the loss of fabric due to the freeway. Across the street to the west, buildings dating to the time of construction of the Western Union Building remain. Surface parking on the east has impacted the setting.

The building retains its original form, plan, proportion, scale, and massing and continues to convey its historic function. The original reinforced concrete structural system is intact; this and its original brick veneer walls reflect building technologies of the period of construction. The building retains a high degree of its character-defining stylistic treatment and ornamentation. The original pattern of fenestration remains. The only irreversible loss is of the original window units and some of the storefront elements. The window openings retain their original size/configuration, brick lintels, and limestone sills. Two of the original storefront openings remain intact and other original elements of the storefront remain including areas dedicated to transoms. Two bays on the Walnut Street façade in the north end and third bay from the north are original. Although boards cover the central entrance on 7th Street, it retains its original elements and materials, as does the entrance on the eastern end of the façade. The building retains all of the key exterior materials dating from the period of historic significance. Its most significant

³ *Kansas City (MO) Times*, 23 May 1944 (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 4

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

loss of materials is that of the original wood and steel window units. The building retains all of its highly articulated brickwork and stonework including piers, corbels, and tapestry brick frieze, interspersed with contrasting square-cut limestone medallions and stone stringcourses.

The building also retains important original character-defining spatial elements.⁴ The basement floor is virtually unaltered. On the first floor, most of the original doors, hardware, corridor and lobby configurations, and interior stair components remain intact. Removal of four sections of the original interior walls, as well as original counters, toilet stalls, and fixtures has occurred. The second floor originally contained men's and women's locker rooms and toilets, a restaurant, and telephone room. The original walls separating these spaces and the fixtures associated with their historic uses are gone. This floor is now open with exposed structural concrete columns and beams. On the third floor, removal of seven sections of the original walls occurred as a result of changes in technology made by Western Union in 1944 and 1960-1961. In 1944, the removal of two original walls on the fourth floor occurred as a result of changes Western Union made to accommodate new technology. The original window openings and skylights are intact. (Some of the skylights are exposed others are boxed in and covered on the roof.)

National Register Bulletin #15 recommends, when possible, an assessment of integrity based on comparison of like resources. Two commercial buildings of similar size/scale, function, and level of architectural stylistic detail and craftsmanship are currently listed in the National Register of Historic Places for significance under Criterion A in the area of Commerce. At the time of their listing, these buildings had similar integrity issues relating to the retention of original window frames and sashes, as well as ground floor fenestration. Despite the loss of original materials and the use of inappropriate infill or replacement windows, these buildings retained significant amounts of architectural details including brickwork, ornamentation, and design elements demonstrating high levels of academic design and craftsmanship to qualify for listing in the National Register. As such, they provide an "*en pointe*" precedent and integrity threshold for inclusion of the Western Union Building in the National Register for significance under Criterion A.

The 1919-1920 Kirkwood Building at 1737-1741 McGee Street in Kansas City, Missouri is a four-story corner commercial building measuring approximately 99 feet by 116 feet. This building has concrete construction with brick veneer and was designed by a prominent Kansas City architectural firm. Like the Kirkwood Building, the Western Union building has suffered the loss of some of the first-floor storefront display windows, as well as the original window frames and sashes on the upper stories. The Western Union Building is similar to the Kirkwood Building in its level of ornamentation and stylistic elements, as well as retention of materials.

The Townley Metal and Hardware Company Building at 200-210 Walnut Street has a period of significance dating from 1895-1944. The five-story brick commercial building measures 142 feet by 174 feet and its design reflects the

⁴ Based on comparison of original plans and current conditions.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 5

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

Renaissance Revival style. The building's first story on the primary façade (east) has been substantially altered with modern, multi-pane and multi-panel, overhead garage doors in two bays of this façade. In comparison to the Townley Building, the Western Union Building has suffered less loss to the ground floor façades. Like the Townley Building, it has suffered the loss of window units in the upper floors. Unlike the Townley Building, new windows rather than brick fill the original windows, allowing more appropriate window units to be installed in the future without damaging the original surround, lintel, and sills. Both buildings have the same degree of stylistic ornamentation. Unlike the Townley Building, with the exception of the loss of storefront display windows and original window units, the Western Union Building has suffered no loss of material/ornamentation or use of infill that, if removed, could damage adjacent building materials.

Thus, because of the retention of its location and the retention of a high degree of its original setting, plan and form, style and ornamentation, structural elements, materials, and evidence of skilled craftsmanship, the Western Union Building retains the essential physical features that enable it to convey its historic identity and function during the period of its significant association with communications technology.

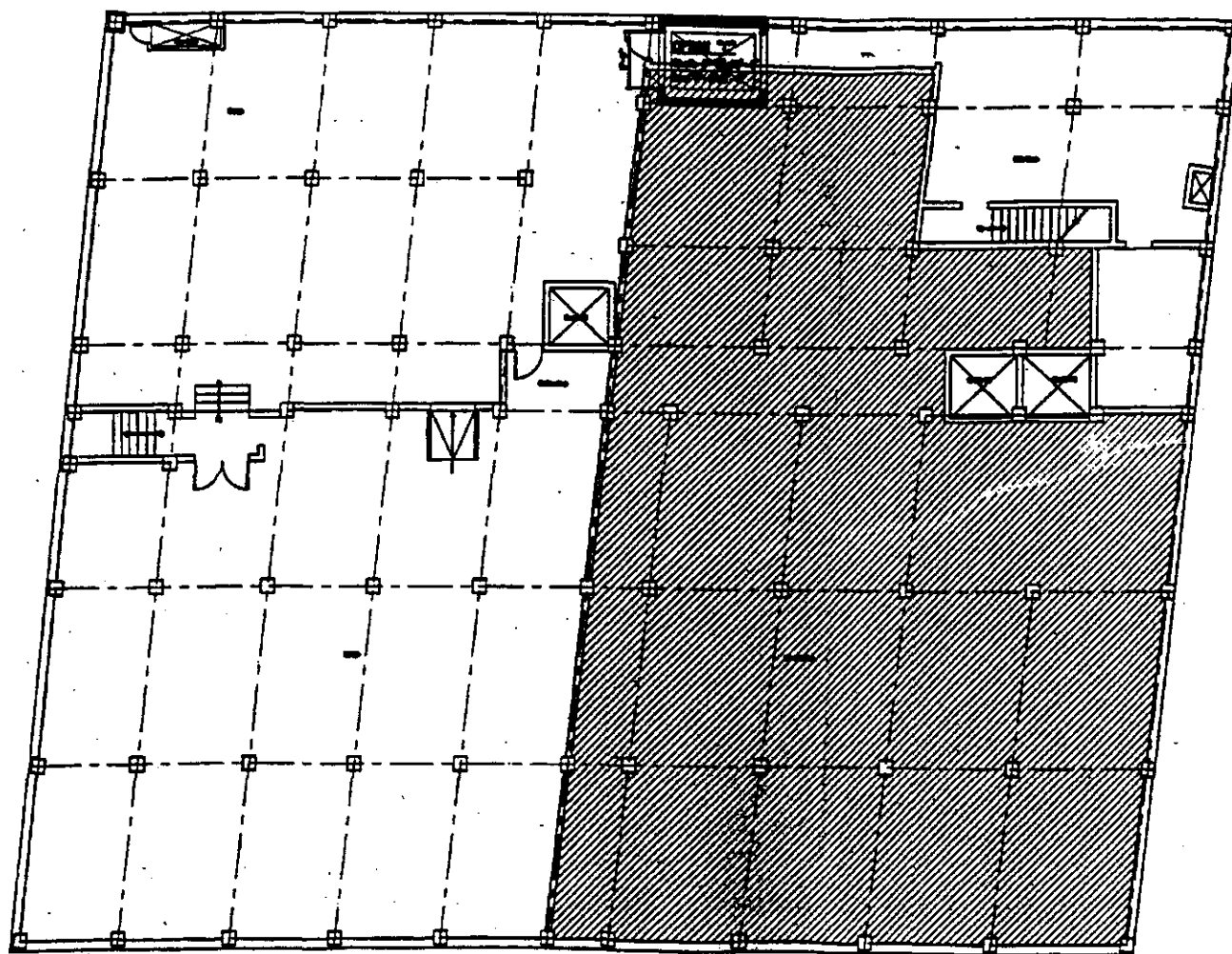
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 6

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 1: CURRENT FLOOR PLAN — BASEMENT FLOOR



Note: Ignore shaded areas; these reflect a proposed usage.

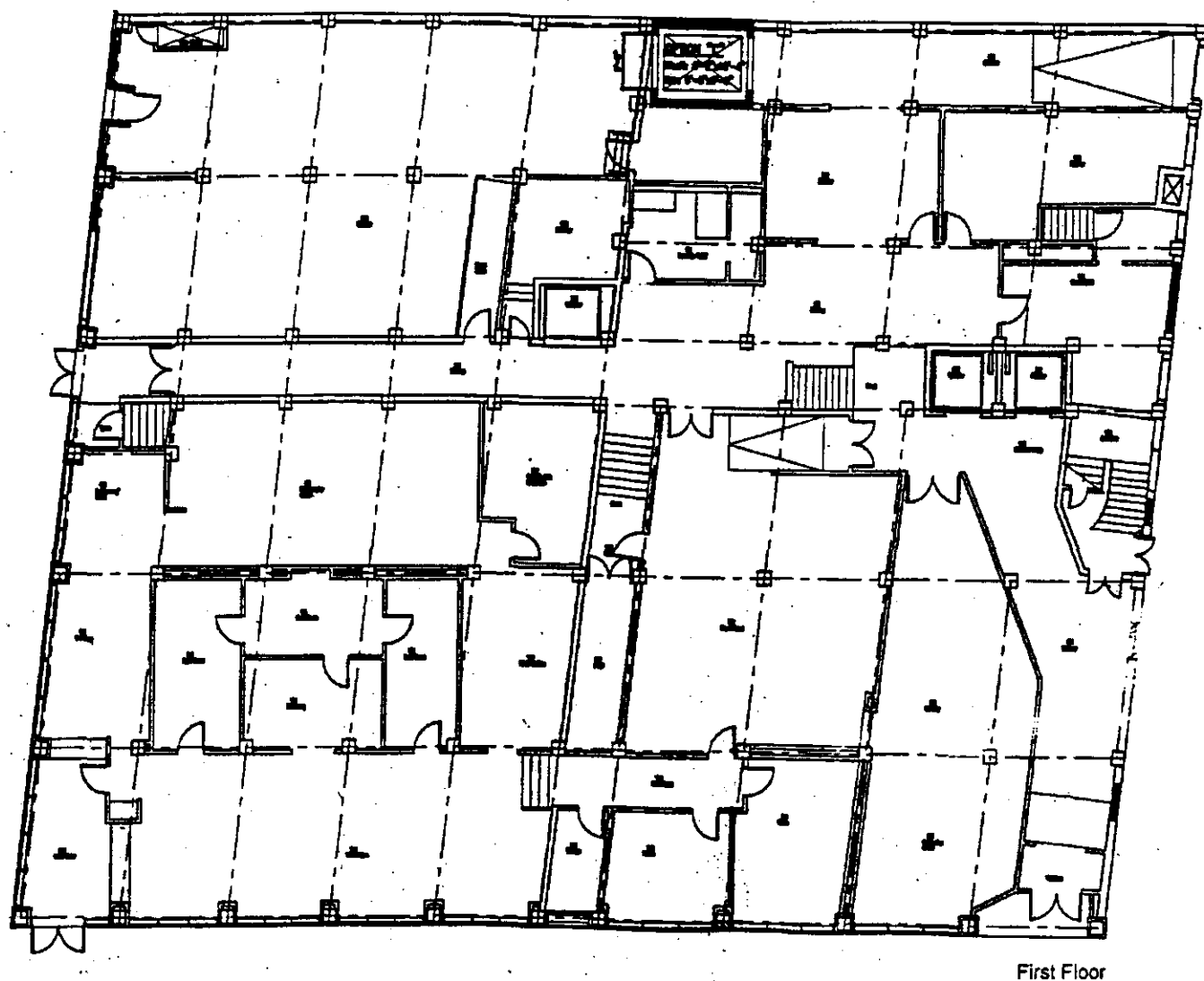
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 7

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 2: CURRENT FLOOR PLAN — FIRST FLOOR



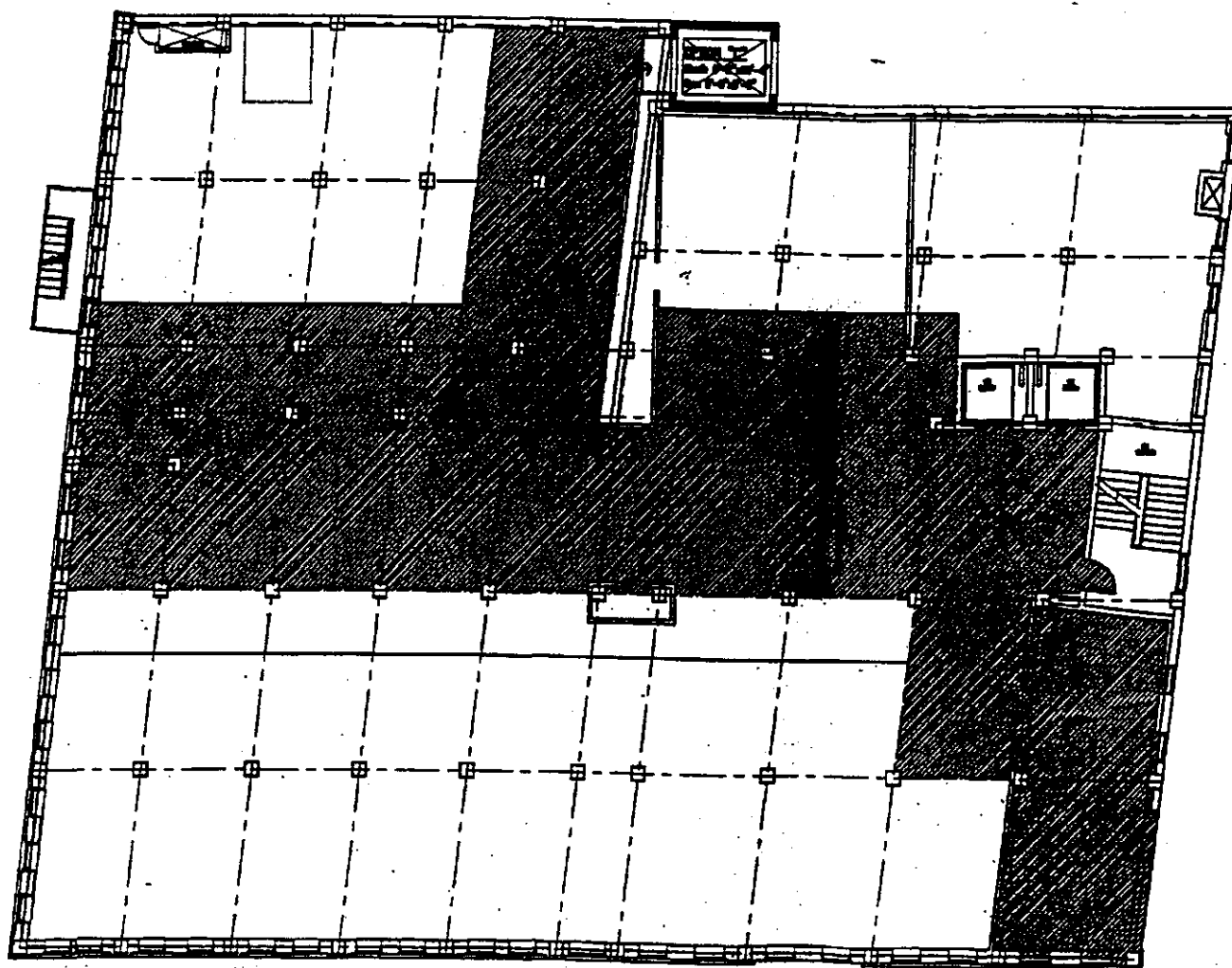
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 8

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 3: CURRENT FLOOR PLAN — SECOND FLOOR



Second Floor

Note: Ignore shaded areas; these reflect a proposed usage.

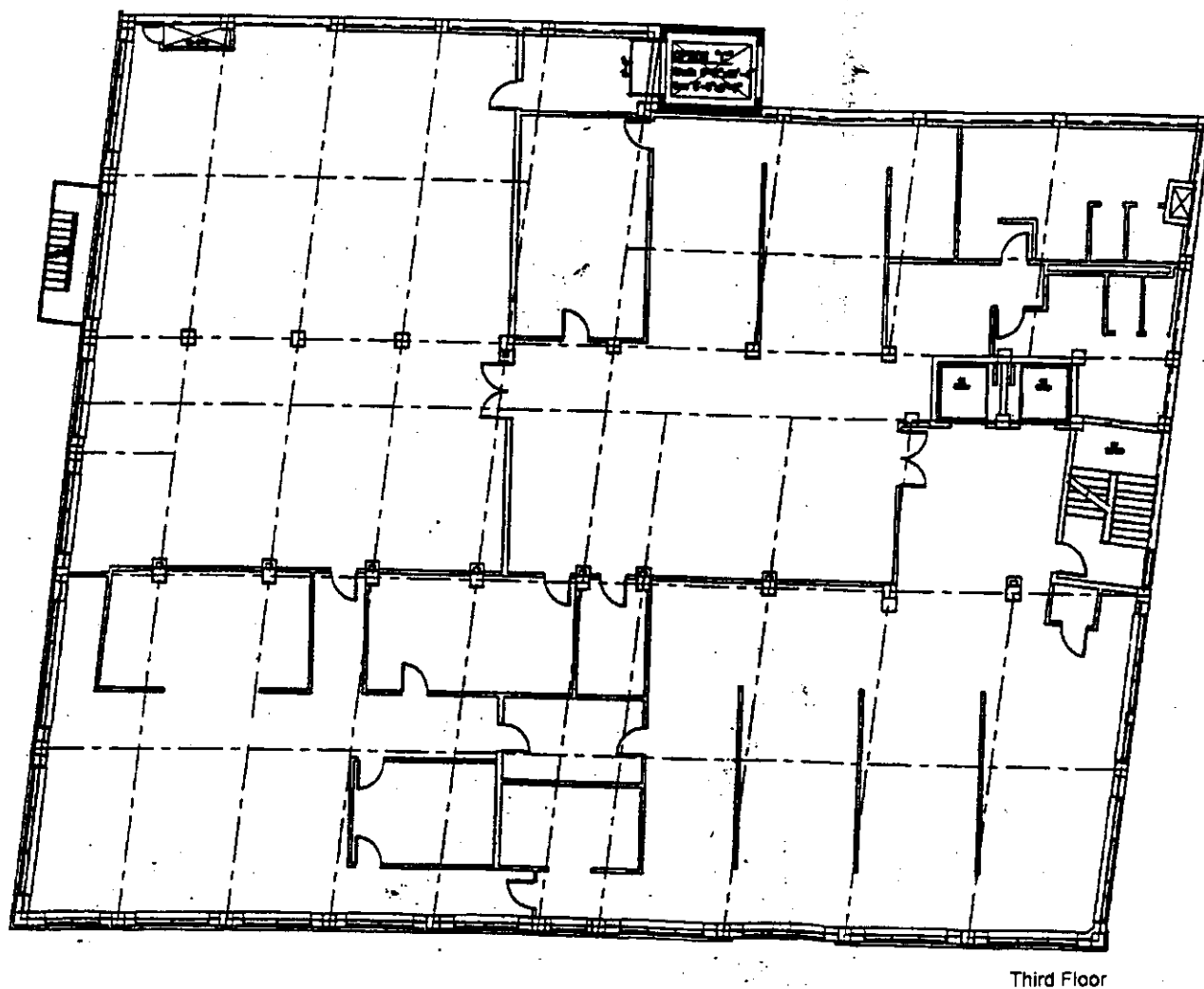
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 9

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 4: CURRENT FLOOR PLAN — THIRD FLOOR



Third Floor

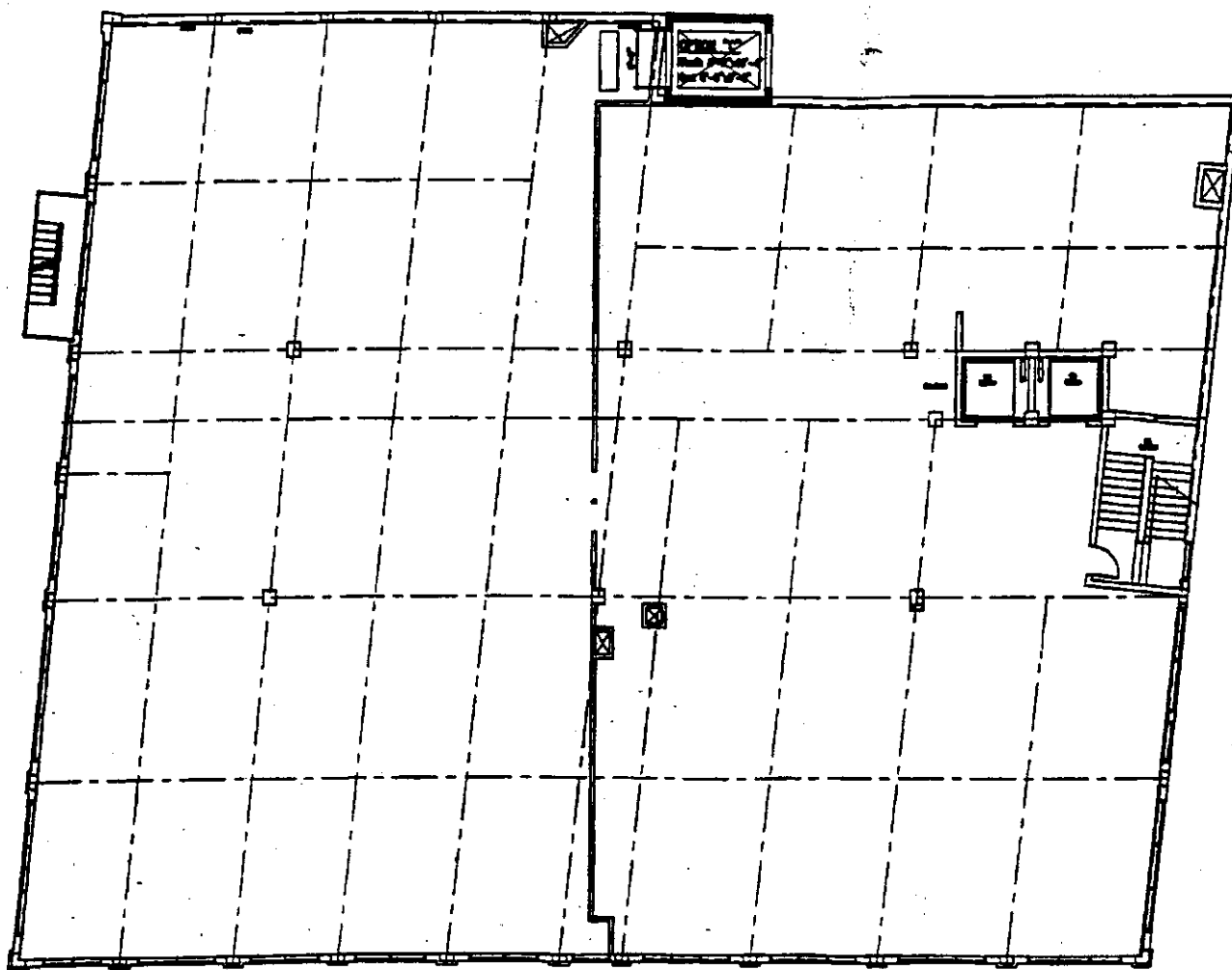
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 10

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 5: CURRENT FLOOR PLAN — FOURTH FLOOR



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 11

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Western Union Telegraph Company Building, erected in 1920 in Kansas City, Missouri, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its local significance in Communications. The building, designed for Western Union by Charles A. Smith, a principal in the firm of Smith, Rea & Lovitt, to house a regional telegraph wire switching center was adapted over the years to utilize new technologies. As such, it is a unique property type and is significant for its association with the evolution of the Western Union Telegraph Company during the early to mid-twentieth century, a time when the company dominated wire communications in the United States. During this period, the company grew not only to dominate the telecommunications industry, but also to advance new technologies and adapt them into everyday use. In particular, Western Union's presence in Kansas City as one of a series of national switching centers is significant for its association with the technological evolution of wire communications. After Western Union constructed the 7th and Walnut streets building in 1920, its regional role grew from transmitting and delivering telegrams, to a significant national component in the long-distance and worldwide communications business. The selection of the facility, in the 1940s, to serve once again as a major component in a new computerized switching network further enhances its significance. The Western Union building is thus associated with a period when the Western Union Company dominated long-distance communications nationally. The building's period of significance dates from its completion in 1920 and continues to 1952, the arbitrary fifty-year cutoff date established by the National Register program.

ELABORATION

HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF THE WESTERN UNION TELEGRAPH COMPANY

As early as 1832, Samuel Morse, assisted by Alfred Vail, conducted successful experimental transmissions of messages across electric wire. Morse, Vaile, and Leonard Gale further refined their electromechanical telegraph. In 1837, Morse filed a caveat for the telegraph with the U.S. Patent Office.⁵ The simple machine featured a key that, when depressed, interrupted the flow of electricity through a wire. The resulting dots and dashes could be recorded on a printer or interpreted orally. In 1838, Morse perfected his sending and receiving code and organized a company making Vaile and Gale his partners.⁶ In 1843, Congress appropriated \$30,000 to Morse's Magnetic Telegraph Company to construct an experimental telegraph line along the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad's route from

⁵ Robert S. Harding, "Register of the Western Union Telegraph Company 1848-1963." (Western Union Telegraph Company Records, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, accessed 12 February 2002; available from <http://www.si.edu/lemelson/dig/westernunion.html>; Internet.

⁶ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 12

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

Washington, D.C. to Baltimore, Maryland. On May 24, 1844, Morse transmitted the world's first official telegraph message — "What Hath God Wrought."⁷

The Magnetic Telegraph Company completed the first commercial telegraph line in the spring of 1846 with the construction of a line between Washington, D.C. and New York, New York.⁸ Soon after, various companies formed and began constructing lines throughout the East Coast. Although the owners of Samuel Morse patents licensed most of these lines, some utilized rival technologies. (The early Morse telegraph received recorded messages on paper tapes in dots and dashes. After 1856, operators learned to transcribe messages by sound/ear.)

By 1851, there were over fifty separate telegraph companies operating throughout the northeastern United States.⁹ In April of that year, Hiram Sibley and a group of businessmen from Rochester, New York organized the New York and Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Company (NYMVPTC), the predecessor of Western Union. The company began establishing new lines as well as acquiring and consolidating existing lines. During the first five years, NYMVPTC acquired eleven other lines and joined its eastern network with a new telegraph line that ran west to St. Joseph, Missouri. In 1856, the name of the company changed to the Western Union Telegraph Company, "signifying the union of 'western' lines into one system."¹⁰ During the following five years, similar consolidations occurred throughout the telegraph industry, with six companies providing the majority of telegraph service: The American Telegraph Company (covering the Atlantic and some Gulf states); The Western Union Telegraph Company (covering states north of the Ohio River and parts of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Minnesota); the New York Albany and Buffalo Electro-Magnetic Telegraph Company (covering New York State); the Atlantic and Ohio Telegraph Company (covering Pennsylvania); the Illinois & Mississippi Telegraph Company (covering sections of Missouri, Iowa, and Illinois); and the New Orleans & Ohio Telegraph Company (covering the southern Mississippi Valley and Southwest).¹¹

As tensions mounted on the eve of the Civil War, the logistical need to extend telegraph service between coasts became more apparent. At this time, the Pony Express provided mail service from the westernmost telegraph service at St. Joseph, Missouri to points west, as well as to the individually operated telegraph lines across California. The trip by horseback from St. Joseph, Missouri to Sacramento, California often took ten days. In 1860, Congress passed the Pacific Telegraph Act to fund a transcontinental telegraph system. The legislation

⁷ *The History of Western Union*, (Morse Telegraph Club; accessed 12 February 2002); available from http://members.tripod.com/morse_telegraph_club/comphis.htm; Internet. Previous dispatches occurred during testing.

⁸ Harding.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ *The History of Western Union*.

¹¹ Harding.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 13

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to call for bids, and when the other two bidders dropped out, Hiram Sibley, representing Western Union, won the contract by default.¹²

The company's first step was to consolidate the many small telegraph companies in California into the California State Telegraph Company. This entity then organized the Overland Telegraph Company to handle construction east from the easternmost line in Carson City, Nevada to Salt Lake City, Utah. Sibley organized the Pacific Telegraph Company to construct the line westward from Omaha, Nebraska to Salt Lake City, Utah. The lines met in October 1861 after less than four months of work. Each of the companies then merged into Western Union.¹³ The Pony Express, which the government subsidized to bridge the gap during construction, became obsolete and closed its business operations.

The transcontinental telegraph line played a crucial role in sustaining the war effort and uniting states and territories supporting the Union during the Civil War. The first telegraph messages from Utah and California were pledges of allegiance to the Union from the respective governors despite rumors that they had seceded.

During the 1860s, the coupling of telegraph and railroad interests became common and eventually the standard. "One railroad after another turned to the telegraph as an operations aid [and] most new railroads had telegraphic lines built along their new rights-of-way."¹⁴ Western Union trained railroad clerks and depot masters to be telegraph operators and, as a result, a train dispatcher telegraphed the orders that controlled the movement of trains. This arrangement also provided constant security and easily accessible repair crews. In exchange for free telegraph service, railroad companies agreed to instruct their employees to watch the line, straighten and reset poles, mend wires, and report to the telegraph company.¹⁵ With the completion of the transcontinental railroad line in 1869, Western Union relocated its lines on the coast-to-coast railroad right-of-way, further solidifying the standard telegraph/railroad partnership.

In addition to obvious commercial and political benefits, the symbiotic collaboration between the telegraph and railroad companies had far-reaching social consequences. In 1865, the United States Naval Observatory began using the telegraph to transmit time signals to Washington, D.C. Western Union, in turn, synchronized their main office clocks in larger cities by telegraph with the United States Naval Observatory. Western Union began taking time service subscribers whom they connected to the synchronized main office clocks. Subscribers received synchronizing signals every hour. In response to widespread scheduling confusion from no standardized means of measuring time, United States railroads began synchronizing their times with the Western Union time. This

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jean S. Ray, *Railroads and Telecommunication*, (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, July 1995, accessed 12 February 2002); available from <http://www.madere.com/firstnet.html>; Internet.

¹⁵ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 14

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

standardization of time, made possible through Western Union telegraph, eventually changed the nation's perspective on speed, punctuality, and timeliness. With standardized time and a focus on timekeeping, a social revolution in work habits and performance occurred.

LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

Due in large part to these strong partnerships with the railroad companies, Western Union enjoyed an unassailable position in the telegraph industry. Innovation occurred as a result of the stability of the industry. As early as 1866, the company introduced stock tickers to speed New York Stock Exchange quotations to brokerage firms. The company launched its money transfer services in 1871. In the early 1870s Western Union purchased the duplex telegraphy, which allowed two messages to be sent over a wire simultaneously, one in each direction. Thomas Edison's Quadruplex, which followed shortly thereafter, allowed four messages to be sent over the same wire simultaneously, two in one direction and two in the other.¹⁶

In 1873, Western Union purchased a majority of shares in the International Ocean Telegraph Company, marking the company's entry into the foreign telegraph market.¹⁷ By the 1880s, the company absorbed over 500 telegraph companies throughout the nation. More than three-fourths of the United States railroad companies had agreements with Western Union and 80 percent of the nation's telegraphic messages passed through the 12,386 interconnecting Western Union offices.¹⁸ So large and successful was the company that it was among the original eleven stocks tracked in the first Dow-Jones Average in 1884.¹⁹

Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century, the telegraph was one of the most important factors in the development of social and commercial life in America. Only two other new inventions – the telephone and the radio – superseded the telegraph as a leader in the communication revolution of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.²⁰

EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY DEVELOPMENT

In 1908, American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T) gained control of Western Union, providing the benefit of sharing lines and ordering telegrams by telephone. In 1913, as part of move to avoid suit under the federal antitrust laws, AT&T separated from Western Union.²¹

¹⁶ Harding.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ray.

¹⁹ *The History of Western Union.*

²⁰ Harding.

²¹ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES Robert Holden, Governor • Stephen M. Mahfood, Director

CONTINUATION SHEET
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 8 Page 15

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
www.dnr.state.mo.us Jackson County, Missouri

Over the years, Western Union's research engineers contributed to advancing communication technologies. As noted, the company developed multiple telegraphies, a method of carrying several messages on one line, and installed lines connecting workplaces directly to local telegraph offices. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Western Union developed its own submarine cable technology and operated a fleet of cable-laying ships. As early as 1904, the company began using the radiotelegraph to reach passengers on ships at sea.

In the early 1920s, the teletypewriter began to replace the sending key and sounder unit (which made the clicking noise). The company's teletypewriter network connected branch offices and individual companies enabling them to communicate rapidly and inexpensively within the business community.²² At that time, the company also began to station telegraphers ringside at boxing matches and in the press box at baseball games to relay play-by-play reports to newspapers and radio stations. Western Union also provided operators and terminals at political conventions and other public meetings to aid reporters needing to file timely dispatches. In 1920, the first photographic images telegraphed across the ocean from Europe to America were via Western Union cables. The company offered such low rates to the Associated Press that, for many years, Western Union handled nearly all of the wire service that the press required.²³

Western Union messengers were a familiar sight in both large cities and small communities. A complete wardrobe department outfitted the company's 14,000 messengers who adhered to strict standards of dress and performance after a rigorous training course.

Providing service to the public was so important that messengers were often sent on unusual errands. They might be asked to deliver advertising samples, drop in daily on an elderly person, round up partners for a bridge game, take children to the movies, or hold a place in line at a ticket window. Of course, the most important job was delivering a message — even if it meant sailing 12,000 miles to reach the president of the embattled Boer Republic in South Africa, or climbing a flagpole to deliver a telegram to "shipwreck" Kelly.²⁴

At Christmastime 1935, Western Union offered the first of its fixed text holiday messages. Soon it was possible to send dozens of special messages and, later, presents via the wire.

By this time, the company was well established as the provider of unique services to the government and commercial sector. Beginning with the Civil War, Western Union provided direct messaging for the White House communications room. During the Civil War and subsequent wars, the company supplied the transfer and

Integrity and excellence in all we do

²² *The History of Western Union.*

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

STATE OF MISSOURI
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Bob Holden, Governor • Stephen M. Mahfood, Director

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 8 Page 16

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

messaging needs for troops. Western Union provided internal communications services for the Department of Defense and external communications with other agencies including supplying microwave communications among defense and intelligence agencies. The Federal Reserve Bank used the Western Union information networks to connect member banks to a central computer center. Other networks assisted law enforcement, aviation, and weather agencies.²⁵

Although the company's business focus was almost exclusively on transmitting and delivering telegrams, innovations continued within the company. In 1935, Western Union developed desktop faxing and introduced the first intercity facsimile service. Four years later, the company installed its first major private wire system.²⁶

MID-TWENTIETH CENTURY TO THE PRESENT

In 1945, Western Union finally merged with its longtime rival — the American Postal Telegraph Company. Due to the merger and the acquisition of some five hundred other competitors, Western Union was, by the end of World War II, the largest company in its field. Building on wartime advances in radio communications, the company pioneered the first commercial intercity microwave system in 1945.²⁷ (The company would not complete the transcontinental system until 1964, at which time they removed the poles and wires that spanned the continent.) Computerization brought the most dramatic innovations to Western Union. In the 1930s and 1940s, the switching centers used women on roller skates to rush preperforated tapes from receivers to printers to relay messages.²⁸ In the early 1940s, Western Union designed and built computerized message-switching centers, digital networks, and an advanced packet transport network to carry voice and data transmissions, EasyLink electronic mail service, money and financial transfers, as well as Mailgram and other priority messages. In 1958, Western Union introduced Telex, a direct-dial, customer-to-customer teleprinter service.

During the 1960s, faced with steeply declining telegraph revenues, the company expanded into providing a number of other related services such as time-sharing computer systems, teletypes, and satellite communications. In 1974, Western Union added satellite communications to their landlines, launching Westar I — the nation's first domestic communication satellite. By 1982, Western Union was the first United States company to have five satellites orbit the earth.

The Western Union Corporation that formed in the 1970s sold its communications businesses in the early 1990s, emerging as the New Valley Corporation, a banking services and real estate company. Another part of the original company, Western Union Financial Services, became a subsidiary of First Data Corp in 1995, a company that currently specializes in electronic money transfers, electronic mail and fax services, and telegraphs. By the late

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 8 Page 17

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
www.dnr.state.mo.us Jackson County, Missouri

1990s, Western Union had 172 locations (hubs) that maintained connections with clients/subscribers. For example, the Kansas City Hub office maintained direct wire services at "offices" in hotels, newspapers, businesses, etc.

WESTERN UNION IN KANSAS CITY

Until the winter of 1857-1858, telegraph lines from the East reached only as far as Boonville, Missouri. In the spring of 1858, Charles C. Steggins, president of the Missouri River Telegraph Company, presented his plan to city officials to extend those lines to Kansas City in return for a \$25,000 advance. The city accepted his offer in exchange for free services, and Steggins began work immediately. On December 20, 1858, the telegraph company completed the new line to Kansas City. Although there was no celebration, an account reported that local businessmen and newspapermen were elated.²⁹

The Western Union Company purchased the St. Louis and Missouri River Telegraph Company and opened its first telegraph office in Kansas City, Missouri on October 12, 1865. Between 1865 and 1920, the company office was near the heart of Kansas City's centralized commercial district. The first office was at the northwest corner of Second and Main streets. In the 1880s, the company occupied a building at 700 Main Street not too far from its first home.³⁰

The company's first forty years were an integral part of the city's communications and commercial history. Kansas City, Missouri became, in the last half of the nineteenth century, one of the nation's major railroad hubs. The city's central location made it an ideal division point for nearly all of the nation's rail lines and as a major manufacturing and railroad distribution center. The city's population expanded tenfold between 1870 and 1910, reaching nearly 200,000.³¹ During the last quarter of the nineteenth century and first quarter of the twentieth century, Kansas City's retail commerce began in earnest with manufacturers, department stores, and banks, grain and livestock traders and wholesalers doing business all over the United States. These businesses provided a framework for commerce in the city, and Western Union was present to serve their communication and money transfer needs. In the livestock trade alone, salesmen used wire services to locate buyers, execute sales, ship animals outside Kansas City, and to transfer funds. Kansas City's Western Union was not the only provider of telegraphic services, but its nearly monopolistic relationship with the railroad made it the wholly dominant one for buyers and sellers in all types of commerce.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ *Kansas City (MO) Star*, 14 July 1940 (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm. *Integrity and excellence in all we do*

³⁰ "Western Union has Remodeled Office," *Kansas City (MO) Star*, 18 September 1960 (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm.

³¹ George Ehrlich, *Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History 1826-1976* (Kansas City: Lowell Press, 1979), 43.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES John Holden, Governor • Stephen M. Mahfood, Director

CONTINUATION SHEET
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 8 Page 18

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
www.dnr.state.mo.us Jackson County, Missouri

Western Union also chose Kansas City as a major national hub for its communications network because of its geographic location. Nearly halfway between the coasts, it provided a perfect centralized place for the routing of messages. Functioning within a network of eleven regional hubs, operators would receive messages to be sent to locations that did not have direct access. Messages could be quickly sent from hub to hub and then to the recipient's local community or a branch office of Western Union. Other major Western Union hub centers included New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Los Angeles, Portland, and Memphis.

Demand for wire services in cities such as Kansas City continued to increase. Expanding and flourishing companies adopted the latest communication technologies. Time was money and speed of communication was crucial to success. For example, in 1904 the Kansas City Armour Company hired the American DeForest Wireless Telegraph Company to connect the company's packinghouses in various cities so they could communicate among themselves. Feeling its own need for instant communication, the meat processing company did not open the system to other commercial users.³²

In 1915, the Western Union Company began planning a new facility in Kansas City. Service within the community grew 10 percent in 1914; while in St. Louis, the business decreased by the same amount. It was apparent to Western Union that Kansas City was the right place to invest more heavily and that it should, at the same time, make the community a regional communications hub.

In June 1915, the company began negotiations with the city to develop an ordinance permitting the telegraph company to lay 5³/₁₀ miles of conduit and ducts for telephone and telegraph wires and pneumatic tubes underneath certain streets and alleys. The resulting agreement gave the city free use of two pneumatic tubes and paid the city an annual rental of \$200 a mile. The free tubes provided service from the City Hall at 5th and Main streets to 10th and Walnut streets and 10th Street and Grand Avenue.³³ The new infrastructure ensured that Western Union could provide services directly to any subscription business client.

In 1919, the company firmly committed to the Kansas City location and began constructing a new regional hub building at 7th and Walnut streets. The Pioneer Investment Company with Walton H. Holmes of the Pioneer Trust Company financed the project for the New York office of Western Union. At that time, Western Union pursued a general plan of negotiating long leases in a number of headquarters cities. The company moved to its new modern facilities in 1920. The Kansas City, Missouri architectural firm of Smith, Rea & Lovitt designed the building. H. J. Record served as construction supervisor and the J. R. Van Sant Construction Company served as the general contractor.

³² *Kansas City (MO) Star*, 29 September 1904 (Newspaper Clipping File, Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 8 Page 19

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
www.dnr.state.mo.us Jackson County, Missouri

Charles A. Smith (1866-1948), a principal in the firm of Smith, Rea & Lovitt, was a prolific and influential architect in Kansas City, Missouri throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. He served as the architect to the City of Kansas City, Missouri from the 1890s to 1936. Smith's career as an architect began in Des Moines, Iowa with the firm of Bell & Hackney. He followed Hackney to Kansas City, Missouri in 1887 and became partner in the firm five years later. The firm dissolved upon Hackney's death in 1898. Smith formed a partnership with Charles Rea shortly thereafter. Walter U. Lovitt (1875-1920) joined the firm around 1904. Smith, Rea & Lovitt dissolved after the deaths of Lovitt in 1920 and Rea in 1921. Smith continued working until his death in 1948.

With a building specifically designed to relay communications from its clients to other cities through the use of the latest communications technology, New York officials believed that Kansas City was one of their best operating regional hubs. The new building housed its telegraph services on the fourth floor, which was flooded with daylight from windows and skylights for the estimated four hundred workers using the space. The plan reserved most of the second floor for its telephone exchange that handled incoming and outgoing routing of telegrams.³⁴ Amenities such as a kitchen and cafeteria, restrooms and reading rooms for men and women, lockers, and a hospital were also on the second floor. Morse code classrooms shared the third floor with the testing and regulation rooms and bookkeeping and clerical forces. The first floor housed a large general office and rooms for the messenger boys with drive-up curb service facilities, showers and baths, as well as tailor shops and storage.³⁵

The building reflected a change in the technology used to send communication over wire. At the beginning of the twentieth century, sending a wire was fairly simple. Senders wrote messages by hand and Morse operators keyed the message in code to a transmission wire. Another operator received the coded message and translated the message back into words. The receiving operator then routed the message to the recipient. If the wire message came from a great distance, it passed through several locations within the Western Union network. In the 1920s, new technology replaced the key and sounder — the teletypewriting machine. Operators used it to both type and send a customer's message. At the receiver's end, an operator used the machine to make a paper tape of the transmission for the telegram's recipient, or the teletypewriter operator could also reperforate received signals on a tape and these could be retransmitted and later typed again into written word. With this new technology, messages could be keyed with city codes so that once a message reached a hub facility like Kansas City, the operator would quickly reroute it by city code to its destination. At the Western Union building in Kansas City, women on roller skates delivered incoming messages to operators at another location on the floor for transmission to other hubs and cities. Once a message reached its city destination, it might go through another branch office before being

³³ *Kansas City (MO) Times*, 11 June 1915 (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm. *Integrity and excellence in all we do*

³⁴ "New Home of Western Union Nearly Done," *Kansas City (MO) Journal*, 25 April 1919 (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm.

³⁵ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Bob Holden, Governor • Stephen M. Mahfood, Director

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 8 Page 20

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
www.dnr.state.mo.us Jackson County, Missouri

delivered.³⁶ The technology allowed the transfer of a message onto a narrow gum-backed tape that an operator could read. The operator moistened the paper message, affixed it to a telegram blank, and distributed it via the women floor messengers. This method of switching or relaying messages was in use until the 1940s, when new technology required changes to the Kansas City Western Union Building's use patterns.

At the time of construction of the Western Union building, three other telegraph companies operated from rented office space in Kansas City. The 1920 City Directory lists the Dean Automatic Telegraph Company, the Missouri District Telephone Company, and the Postal Telegraph Cable Company. The Postal Telegraph Company appears to be the most serious competitor with branches at the Board of Trade Building, Corridor Finance Building, the Livestock Exchange, the Produce Exchange rotunda, 937 Mulberry, 10th and Walnut, the Baltimore Hotel, 214 19th Street, and the Mercer Hotel. The Western Union Company, operating out of its own building, had branch offices at 107 East 5th Street; 913 North 6th Street in Kansas City, Kansas; 932 Mulberry; the Board of Trade; Bryant Building; Keith and Perry Building; Live Stock Exchange; Baltimore Hotel; Coates House; Union Station; Hotel Muehlbach; 316 Southwest Boulevard, 1003 Grand; 1015 East 31st Street; 10108 Baltimore; Coca Cola Building; New York Life Building; 411 Interstate Building; and the Kansas City Star newspaper.³⁷

The 1920 construction date also reflects a period after World War I that is noted for advances in the communications industry. Prior to wire communication, the publication and distribution of news through newspapers and publishers, as well as the postal system, constituted the basis for the nation's communications network. The advent of the telegraph and telephone in the late nineteenth century initiated the era of wire communications. By the first decades of the twentieth century, these industries experienced consolidation and expansion. Locally, the emergence of dominant companies in wire and wireless communications occurred in the post-World War I period. In 1919, Southwestern Bell Telephone, after merging with the local Home Telephone Company, erected a new skyscraper establishing the communications company as the dominant telephone company in the region. Advances in wireless communications led to the City's first radio broadcast that same year. A second station began broadcasting in 1922.³⁸

In the mid-1940s, Western Union again chose Kansas City as one of its major regional centers for its new, "push button" message relaying technology. The company invested \$2 million in 1947 to retrofit the 7th and Walnut streets building as one of its largest switching centers in the country. In effect, the company brought an early

³⁶ "Your Telegram with Push-Button Control Now Will Be Sent With the Speed of Light," *Kansas City (MO) Star*, 17 September 1948 (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm.

³⁷ *Fiftieth Addition 1920 Kansas City, Missouri Directory and Business Catalogue* (Kansas City: Gate City Directory Company, 1920).

³⁸ "Historic Resources Survey Plan of Kansas City" (Kansas City: Landmarks Commission of Kansas City, Missouri, 1992), 18, 42-46.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

STATE OF MISSOURI Bob Holden, Governor • Stephen M. Mahfood, Director

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 8 Page 21

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
www.dnr.state.mo.us Jackson County, Missouri

computer to Kansas City.³⁹ The "electronic brain," as the company called it, was large, occupying two floors of the Western Union Building, and replaced the manual system of routing telegraphs with an automatic one. (The building area the "brain" consumed was large because electronics miniaturization and digital chips were not available at the time.) The electronic switching system required approximately two hundred technicians and engineers working nearly a year to install the new mass of electronic equipment that included three thousand miles of wire conductors.

With the new technology, manual retransmission of telegrams by operators was no longer required. In the new system, switching clerks could see the message destination on the traditional routing tape and push a designated location button so the message would be automatically transmitted. The Kansas City center served Kansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming and was part of a nationwide network of fifteen such centers. Many centers were the same ones Western Union maintained in its original network hubs in Atlanta, Dallas, St. Louis, Oakland, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, and Boston.⁴⁰

Although the National Register cutoff date determines 1952 as the end of the building's period of significance, Western Union's commitment to Kansas City as a national routing hub and the continued use of the building should not be overlooked. The building continued to serve the company's needs as it added facsimile technology in 1953 and a Telex system (dial telegraph) of private wire services in 1960 for customer-to-customer communication. For the Telex system, the company again remodeled the building to suit new technology and company needs. This time, the third floor was reorganized and changes to the first floor included with new offices, storefronts and windows.⁴¹ In 1964, Western Union ended its national system of telegraph lines, replacing it with a wireless microwave telecommunications network. At this time, the Kansas City building ended its role as a component of a national switching system.

³⁹ *Kansas City (MO) Times*, 9 July 1947 (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm.

⁴⁰ "Your Telegram With Push Button Control Now Will Be Sent With The Speed Of Light,"

⁴¹ "New Wire Service Set: Picture Transmission Machines to be Installed Soon." *Kansas City (MO) Star*, 9 June 1953. (Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections), Microfilm; and "Western Union has Remodeled Office."

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

STATE OF MISSOURI
Bob Holden, Governor • Stephen M. Mahfood, Director

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 8 Page 22

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
www.dnr.state.mo.us
Jackson County, Missouri

CONCLUSION

The Western Union Telegraph Building stands as a physical reminder of the advances and contributions of wire communications that Western Union made nationally and locally beginning with its construction in 1920 through the mid-twentieth century. Through the years, the 1920 building's design with open floor plates with structural concrete columns served the changing communications needs and technologies of Western Union. As one of a system of national hubs, the facility is significant for its associations with the preeminent national telegraph company and the significant changes in telecommunications technology that occurred in the early 1920s and the 1940s.

Integrity and excellence in all we do



RECYCLED PAPER

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Bob Holden, Governor • Stephen M. Mahfood, Director

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

Section 9 Page 23

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
www.dnr.state.mo.us Jackson County, Missouri

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ehrlich, George. *Kansas City, Missouri: An Architectural History 1826-1976*. Kansas City: Lowell Press, 1979.
- City of Kansas City, Missouri Landmarks Commission. January 1994. "Townley Metal and Hardware Company Building" National Register of Historic Places Registration Form by Cydney E. Millstein and Linda F. Becker.
- City of Kansas City, Missouri Landmarks Commission. February 20, 2001. "Kirkwood Building" National Register of Historic Places Registration Form by Susan Richards Johnson.
- City of Kansas City, Missouri Landmarks Commission. 1994. "Western Union Building" Kansas City Historic Resources Survey Form.
- City of Kansas City, Missouri Landmarks Commission. 1984. Building Inventory.
- Fiftieth Addition 1920 Kansas City, Missouri Directory and Business Catalogue*. Kansas City: Gate City Directory Company, 1920.
- Harding, Robert S. "Register of the Western Union Telegraph Company 1848-1963." (Western Union Telegraph Company Records, Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History; accessed 12 February 2002.); available from <http://www.si.edu/lemelson/dig/westernunion.html>; Internet.
- "Historic Resources Survey Plan of Kansas City." Kansas City: Landmarks Commission of Kansas City, Missouri, 1992.
- Kansas City (MO) Star*, 29 September 1904. Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.
- Kansas City (MO) Star*, 14 July 1940. Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.
- Kansas City (MO) Times*, 11 June 1915. Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.
- Kansas City (MO) Times*, 23 May 1944. Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.
- Kansas City (MO) Times*, 9 July 1947. Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.
- Integrity and excellence in all we do*
- The History of Western Union*. (Morse Telegraph Club; accessed 12 February 2002.); available from http://members.tripod.com/morse_telegraph_club/comphis.htm; Internet;

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9 Page 24

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

- "New Home Of Western Union Nearly Done." *Kansas City (MO) Journal*, 25 April 1919. Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.
- "New Wire Service Set: Picture Transmission Machines to be Installed Soon." *Kansas (MO) City Star*, 9 June 1953. Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.
- Oslin, George P. *The First Transcontinental Telegraph Line*. New York, NY: The Western Union Telegraph Company, 1961.
- Piland, Sherry. "A Kansas City Architect: Charles A. Smith." *Historic Kansas City Foundation Gazette*, Jan/Feb 1986.
- Ray, Jean S., *Railroads and Telecommunication: New Orleans, Louisiana* [article online] (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1995, accessed 12 February 2002); available at <http://www.madere.com/firstnet.html>; Internet.
- Smith, Rea and Lovitt, "Business Building Western Union Telegraph Building," Original Plans. Charles A Smith Collection. Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Kansas City. Kansas City, Missouri
- "Western Union has Remodeled Space," *Kansas City (MO) Star*. 18 September 1960, Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.
- "Western Union Telegraph Company," *The Columbia Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition. [book online] (New York, New York: Columbia University Press, 2001, accessed 12 February 2002); available from <http://www.bartleby.com/65/we/WesternU.html>; Internet.
- Withey, Henry F. and Elsie Rathburn. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*. Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1970.
- "Your Telegram With Push Button Control Will be Sent With The Speed Of Light," *Kansas City (MO) Star*, September 12, 1948. Newspaper Clipping File. Kansas City: Kansas City, Missouri Public Library, Special Collections, Microfilm.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 10 Page 25

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the property is the South 37 feet and 9 inches of Lot 4 and all of Lots 5 and 6, Block 7, McDaniel's Addition to the City of Kansas City, in Jackson County, Missouri, except the portion theretofore taken in widening the street. Said premises being further described as a tract of ground at the Northeast corner of 7th and Walnut streets in Kansas City, extending a distance of 109.99 feet on Walnut Street and a distance of 127 feet on 7th Street from Walnut Street eastward to the alley according to the recorded plat thereof.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary is the legally recorded boundary and includes the area occupied by the building footprint and the lots historically and legally associated with the building. These boundaries include but do not exceed the full extent of the resource.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Photographic Sheet Page 26

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 6: PHOTOGRAPHIC LOG

Photographer: Brad Finch, F-Stop Photography, Kansas City, Missouri
Date: August 13, 2002
Location of Negatives: Historic Preservation Services, LLC
323 West 8th Street, Suite 112
Kansas City, Missouri 64105

Photograph #	Camera View
1	Exterior: northeast
2	Exterior: northwest
3	Exterior: southwest
4	Exterior: northwest
5	Exterior: east
6	Exterior: east
7	Exterior: north
8	Exterior: east
9	Exterior: north
10	Exterior: east
11	Interior: 1 st Floor, west side looking to northwest
12	Interior: 1 st Floor, east side looking north from entrance lobby
13	Interior: 1 st Floor, east side, looking north from entrance hall to lobby hall stairway
14	Interior: 4 th Floor, south side looking northwest from stairway
15	Interior: 4 th Floor, west side looking northeast
16	Interior: 3 rd Floor, east side, looking northeast towards elevator and restroom
17	Interior: 1 st Floor, east side, entrance hallway looking north to elevators.

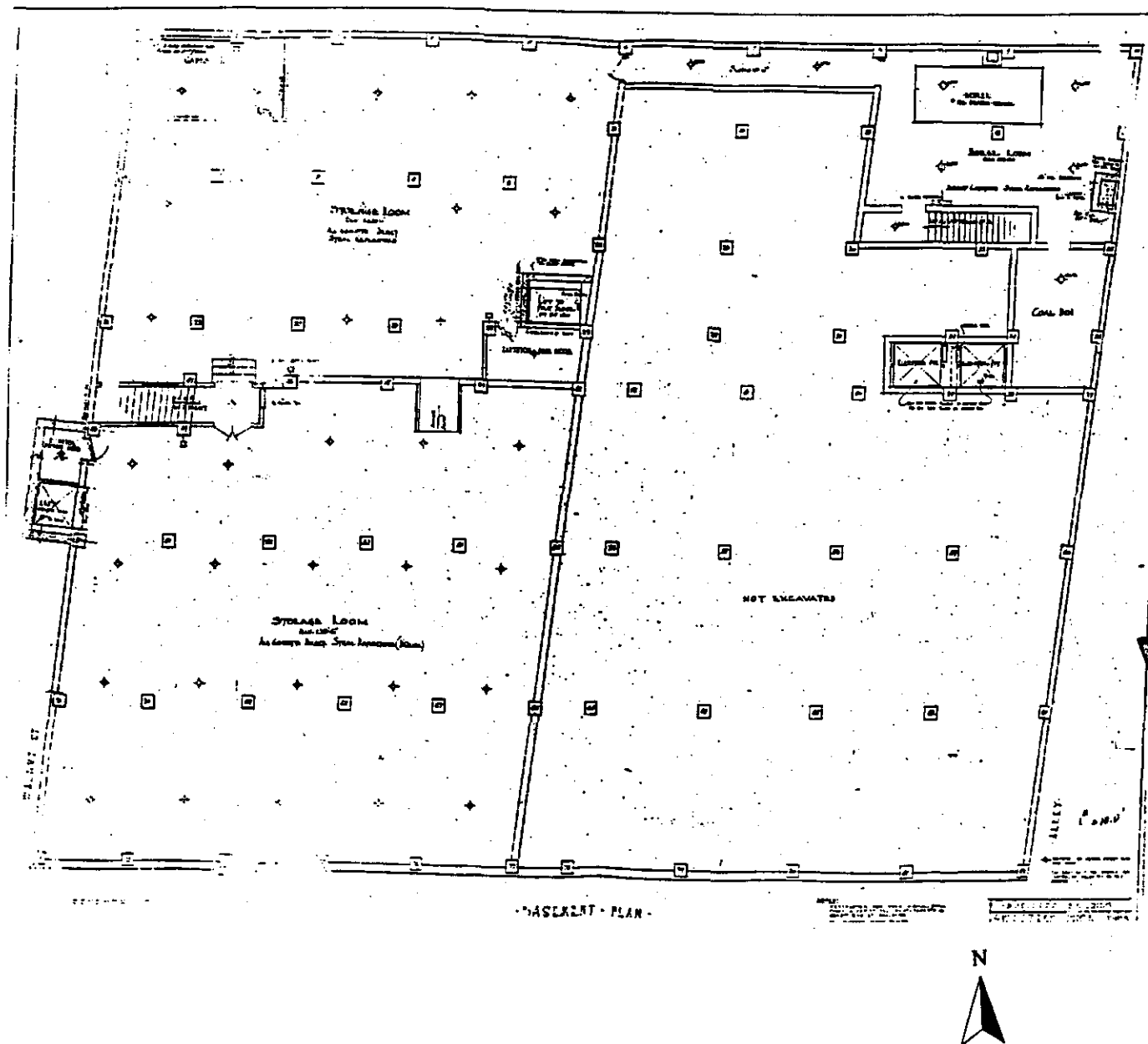
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 27

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 7: ORIGINAL PLAN — BASEMENT



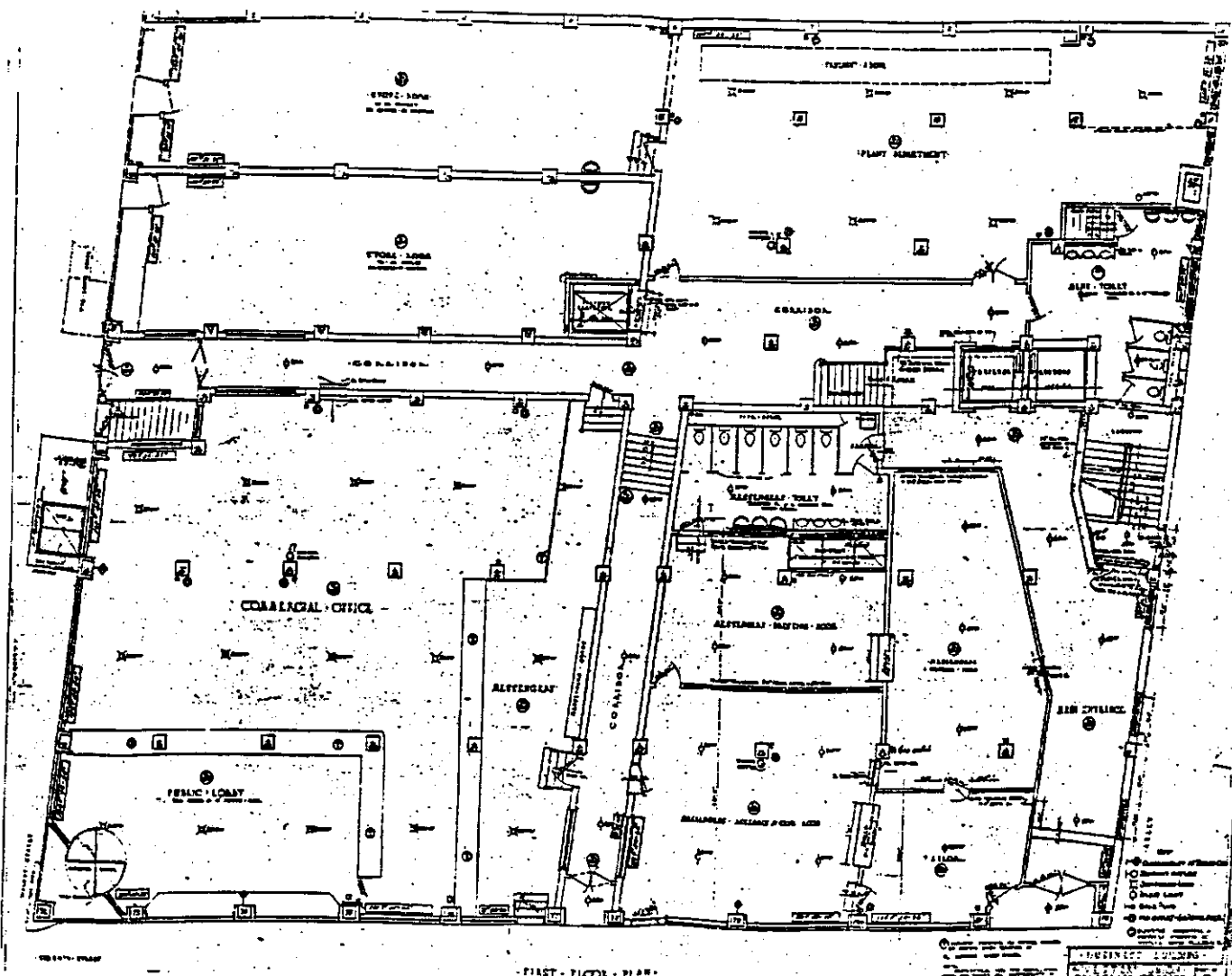
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 28

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 8: ORIGINAL PLANS — FIRST FLOOR



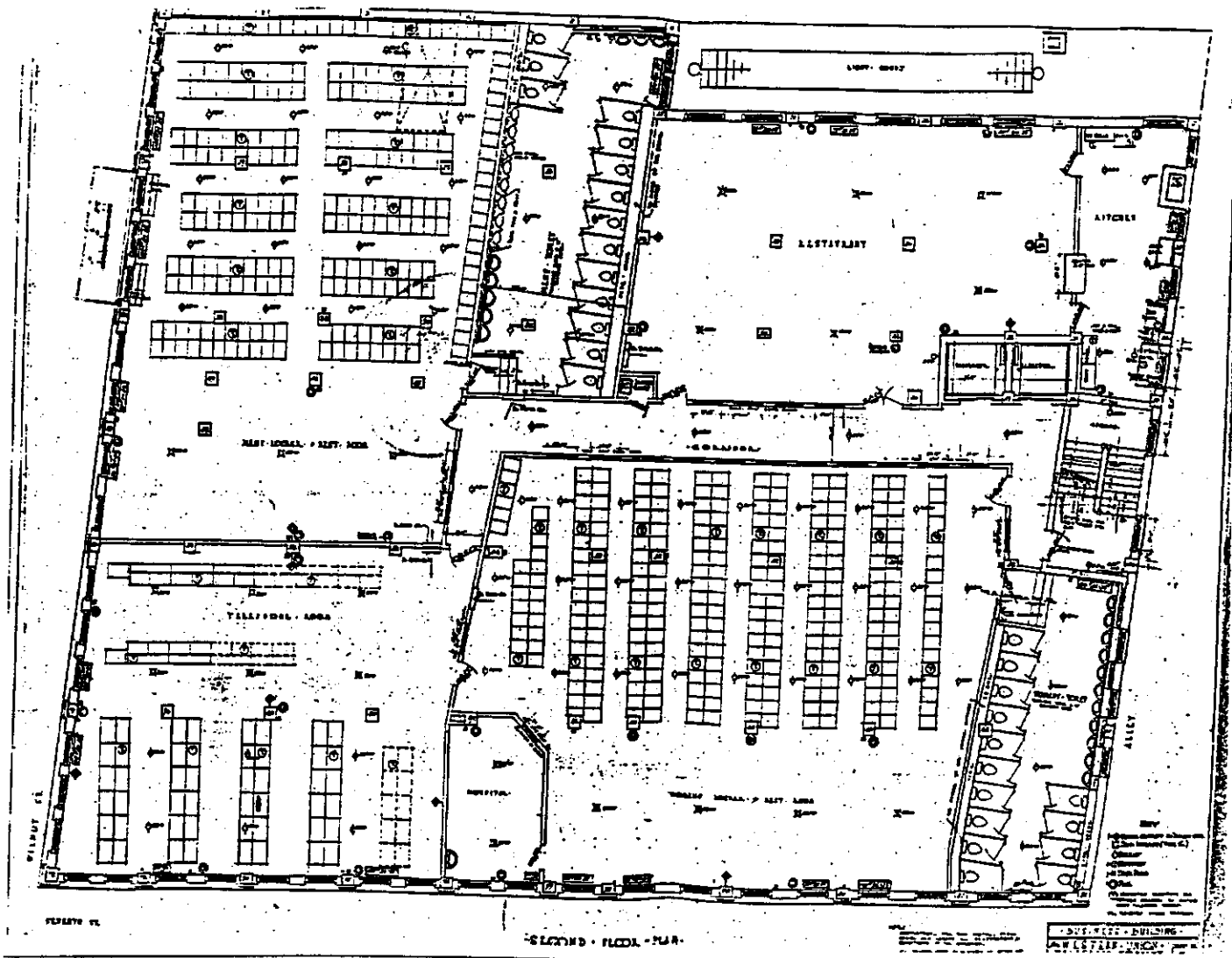
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 29

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 9: ORIGINAL PLANS — SECOND FLOOR



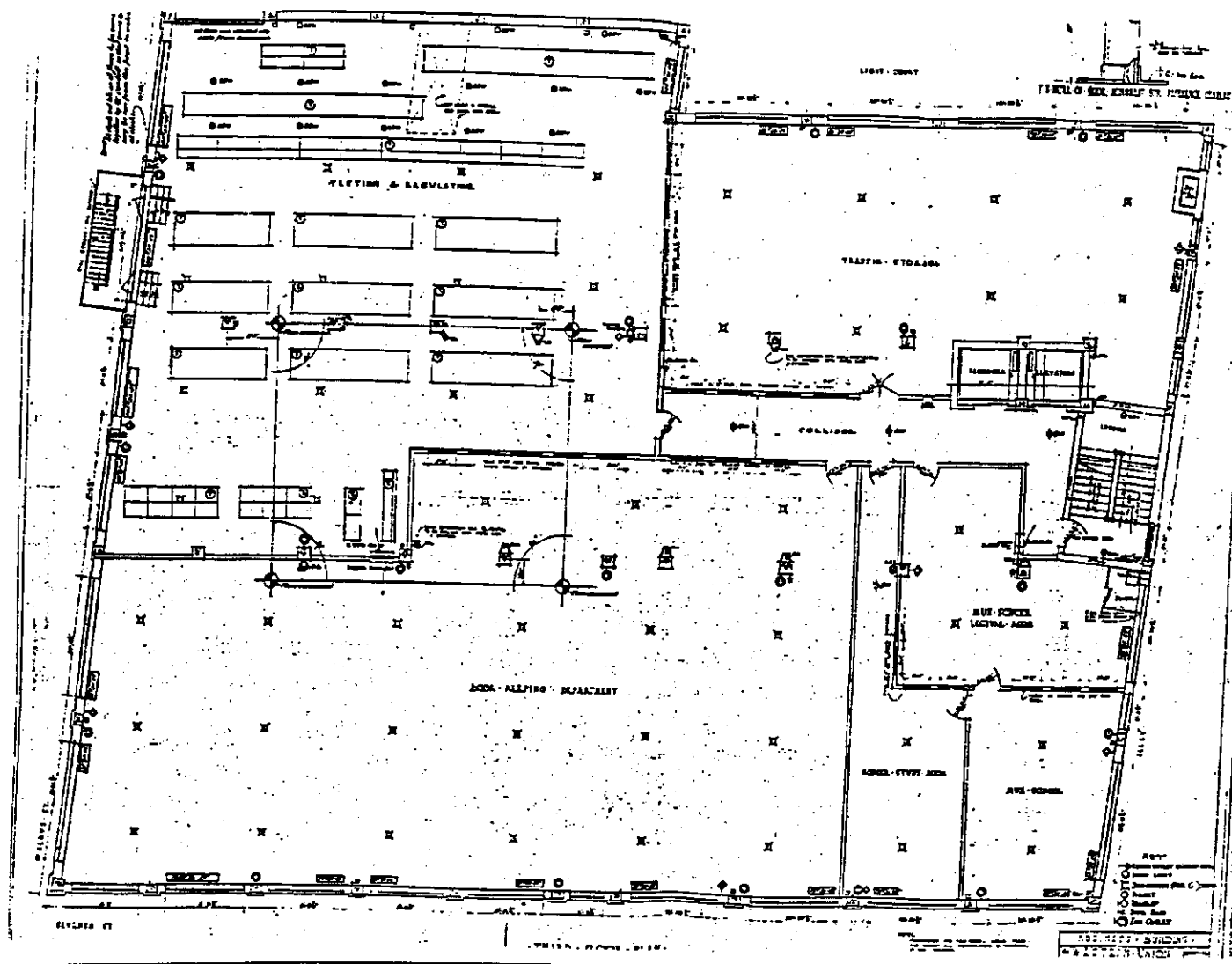
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 30

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 10: ORIGINAL PLANS — THIRD FLOOR



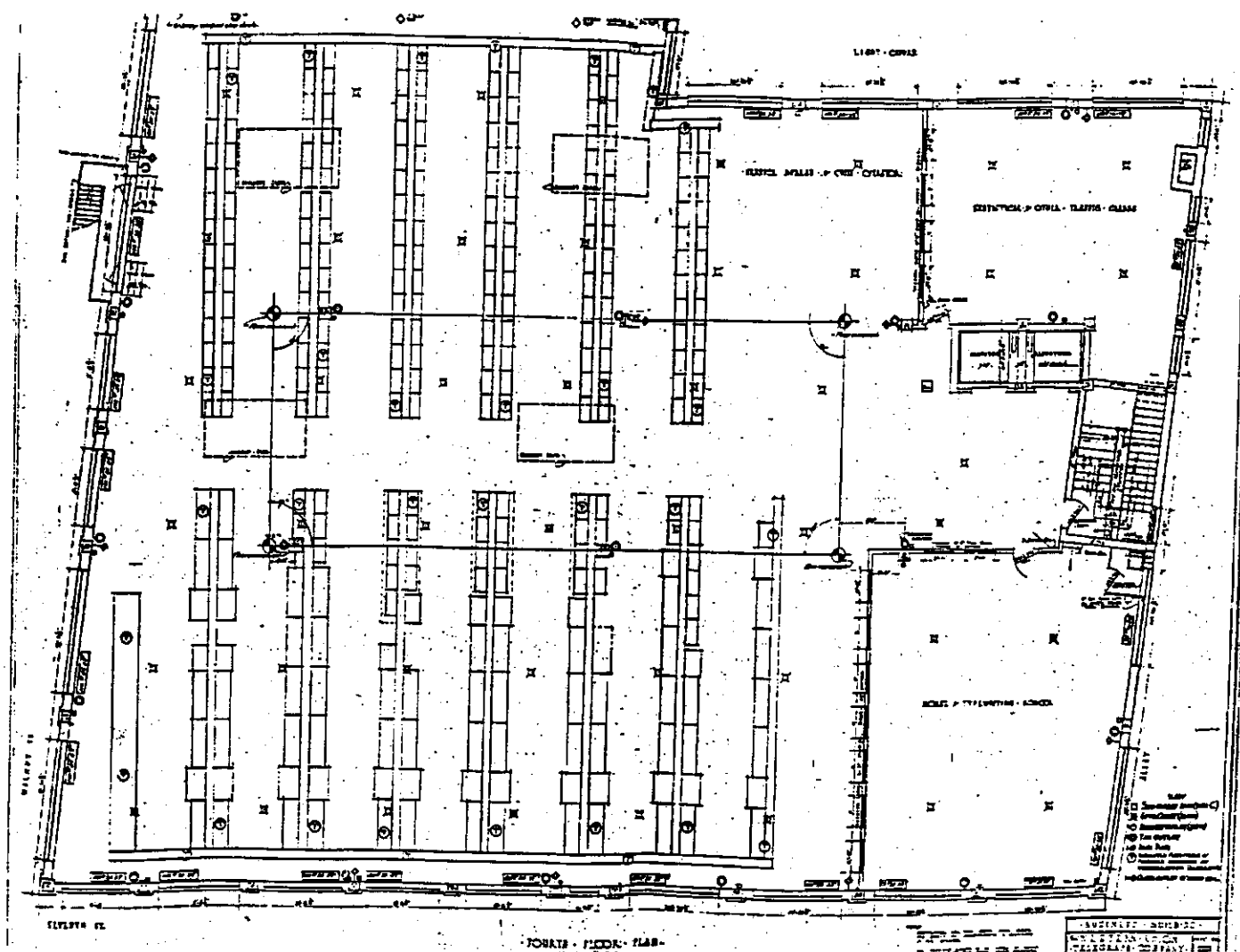
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 31

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 11: ORIGINAL PLANS — FOURTH FLOOR



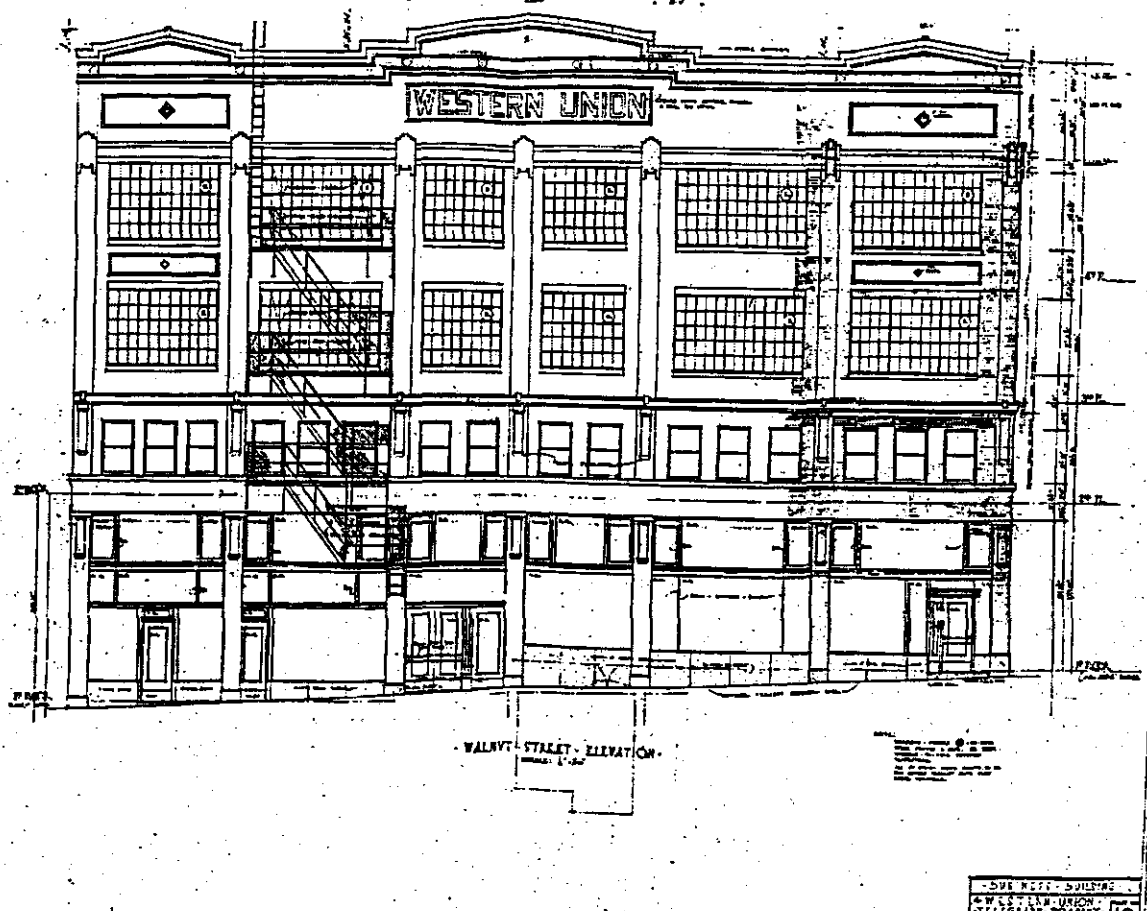
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 32

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 12: ORIGINAL PLANS — WALNUT STREET ELEVATION



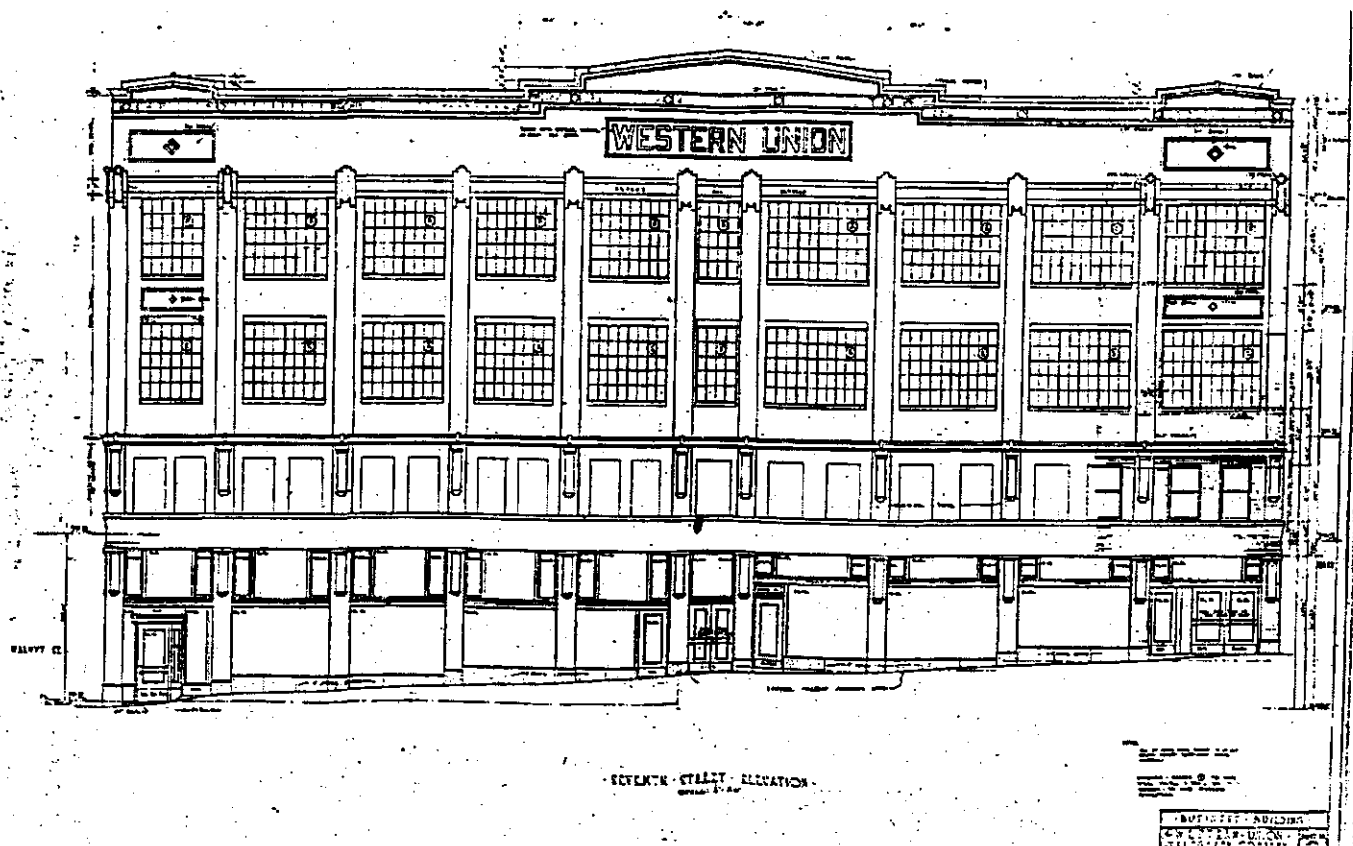
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 33

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 13: ORIGINAL PLANS — SEVENTH STREET ELEVATION



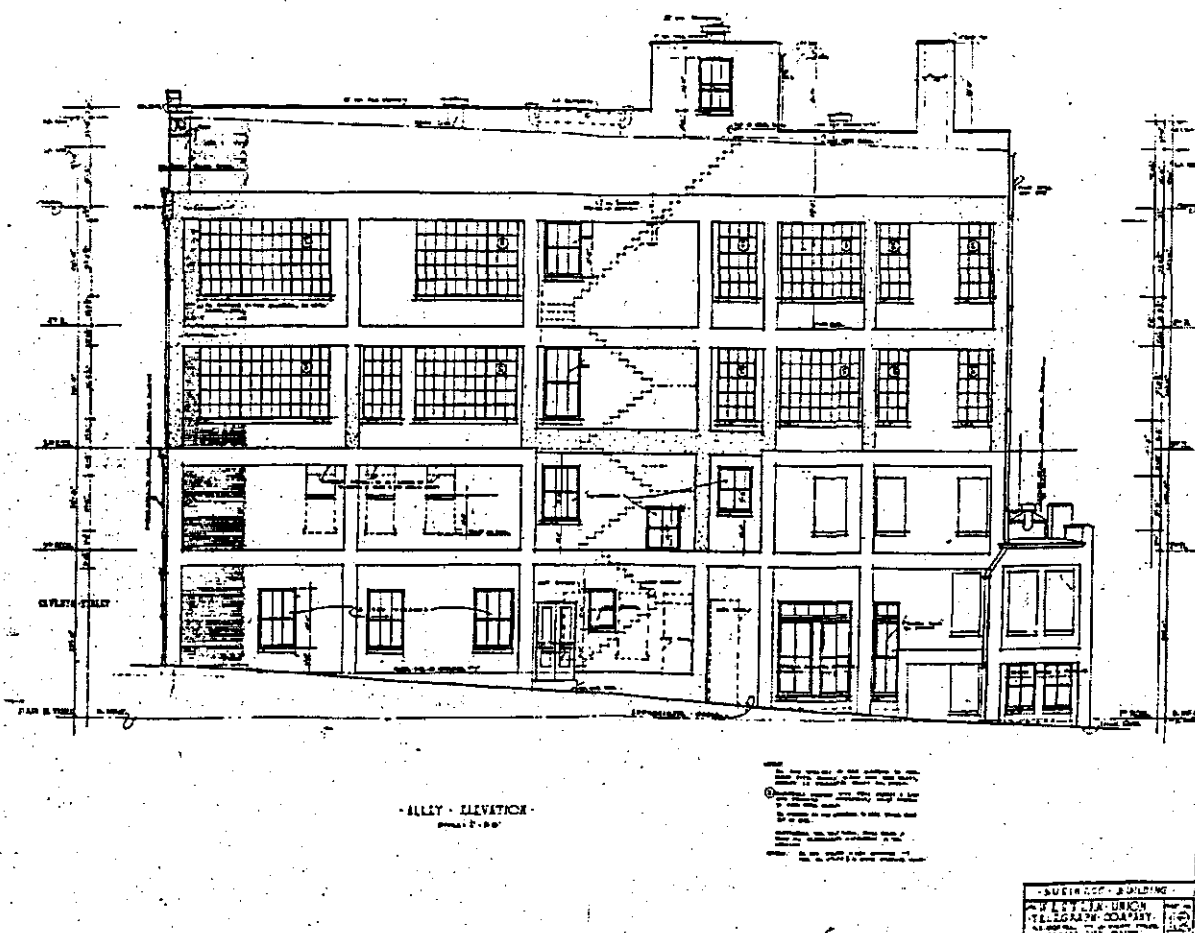
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 34

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 14: ORIGINAL PLANS — ALLEY EAST ELEVATION



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Figures 7-15: Original Floor Plans Page 35

Kansas City, Missouri Western Union Telegraph Building
Jackson County, Missouri

FIGURE 15: ORIGINAL PLANS — NORTH ELEVATION

